

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7893
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMCONSUL MEDAN
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMCONSUL SURABAYJJZMOP
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 JAKARTA 4315

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2
TAGS: PINT, ID
SUBJECT: INDONESIA'S NEW VICE PRESIDENCY

REF: JAKARTA 4163

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT SUHARTO MADE THE BEST OF A BAD SITUATION BY PICKING ADAM MALIK AS HIS VICE PRESIDENT AFTER BEING SPURNED BY SULTAN HAMENGKUBUWONO IX. POPULAR AND ENERGETIC, MALIK IS ALREADY PREPARING TO EXPAND HIS ROLE IN INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND IS COAXING THE PRESIDENT TO INCREASE HIS OWN PUBLIC EXPOSURE. THE VICE PRESIDENCY UNDER MALIK IS CLEARLY DESTINED TO TAKE ON NEW LIFE. HOW WELL SUHARTO AND HIS JAVENESE COTERIE CAN LIVE WITH IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN. END SUMMARY.

2. JILTED VIRTUALLY ON HIS WAY TO THE ALTAR BY HIS LONG-TIME RUNNING MATE AND QUIET DEPUTY, VICE PRESIDENT SULTAN
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HAMENGKUBUWONO IX, PRESIDENT SUHARTO WAS OFFICIALLY GIVEN ONLY 12 DAYS TO FIND A REPLACEMENT. THE REFUSAL OF THE SULTAN TO SERVE AGAIN WAS A MAJOR BLOW TO THE PRESIDENT'S PRESTIGE, PARTICULARLY IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE LACK OF GENERAL CONSENSUS ON HIS POLICIES IN THE PEOPLE'S CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY (MPR) GENERAL SESSION. HAMENGKUBUWONO'S DENIALS OF POLITICAL DIFFERENCES WITH SUHARTO CONTAINED

JAVANESE AMBIGUITIES, AND HIS DECISION WAS WIDELY VIEWED AS AN INDICATION THAT SUHARTO'S MORAL INFLUENCE, AND HENCE POLITICAL POWER, WAS ON THE WANE IN SPITE OF HIS UNOPPOSED RENOMINATION. (THE STREETS LINED WITH TROOPS DURING THE MPR SESSION DID NOTHING TO MITIGATE THIS IMPRESSION.) CLEARLY, A RESPECTED AND POPULAR CIVILIAN FIGURE WAS NEEDED IN THE NUMBER TWO POSITION TO MINIMIZE THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE.

3. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, MPR/DPR CHAIRMAN AND FORMER FONMIN ADAM MALIK WAS ALMOST THE ONLY CHOICE. WHILE HE DOES NOT QUITE MATCH THE SULTAN IN INTEGRITY AND POPULAR PRESTIGE, MALIK IS WELL KNOWN IN BOTH NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CIRCLES AND HIS OUTER-ISLAND ORIGINS, APPARENT ISLAMIC ORTHODOXY AND CIVILIAN STATUS PROVIDED APPROPRIATE BALANCE TO THE TICKET. IN STARK CONTRAST TO THE SULTAN, HOWEVER, MALIK IS A POLITICAL ACTIVIST WITH A FLAIR FOR MAKING NEWSPAPER HEADLINES. THE FRUSTRATIONS THE SULTAN FELT OVER HIS ABILITY TO REACH THE PRESIDENT'S EAR MAY WELL NOT BOTHER MALIK, WHO KNOWS HOW TO CATCH EVERYONE'S EYE. INDEED, THE FRUSTRATIONS FROM THIS SECOND MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE MAY BE LARGELY SUHARTO'S.

4. MALIK REPORTEDLY EXTRACTED PRIOR ASSURANCES FROM THE PRESIDENT THAT HIS NEW ROLE WOULD BE A SUBSTANTIVE ONE. WHEN PRESENTING HIS NEW CABINET, THE PRESIDENT ANNOUNCED
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THAT MALIK'S DUTIES WOULD CENTER ON "NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT," AN EFFORT PERHAPS TO POINT HIM IN AN ACCEPTABLE DIRECTION. AT THE MOMENT, HOWEVER, MALIK SEEMS TO BE CONCENTRATING ON A HOST OF OTHER MATTERS. IN HIS POST-INAUGURAL PRESS CONFERENCE HE IN FACT ADDRESSED THE GOI'S KEY EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL ISSUES BY COMMENTING THAT NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS WITH THE PRC WOULD NOT TAKE MUCH LONGER AND BY URGING A DIALOGUE BETWEEN STUDENT LEADERS AND THE GOVERNMENT. WE HAVE LEARNED FROM ONE OF MALIK'S CLOSEST ASSISTANTS THAT THE VICE PRESIDENT IS ALSO INSERTING HIS VOICE IN THE SELECTION OF SENIOR FOREIGN MINISTRY PERSONNEL.

5. AS A FORMER JOURNALIST, MALIK HAS ALWAYS PUT EMPHASIS ON THE PRESS AS A POLICY TOOL AND HAS RECENTLY SERVED NOTICE THAT HE WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO. ONE OF HIS CLOSEST AIDES INFORMED US THAT, WHEN A WESTERN CORRESPONDENT'S REPORT OF A PERSONAL INTERVIEW WITH MALIK WAS BLOCKED BY THE CENSORS, THE NEW VICE PRESIDENT CALLED IN A BEVY OF FOREIGN REPORTERS TO REPEAT HIS REMARKS, WHICH THEN MADE THEIR WAY THROUGH THE CENSORS. IN THE MEANTIME, MALIK HAS MANAGED TO GET ALMOST DAILY COVERAGE IN JAKARTA NEWSPAPERS, INCLUDING THE LEAD AND TWO ADDITIONAL FRONT-PAGE ARTICLES

IN ONE ISSUE OF A PROMINENT DAILY.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 JAKARTA 4315

6. MALIK, HIS AIDES INFORM US, IS ALSO ATTEMPTING TO
BREAK SUHARTO'S ISOLATION FROM THE PRESS AND PUBLIC. IN
HIS FIRST MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT, MALIK REPORTED HE
HAD RECOMMENDED A MONTHLY PRESS CONFERENCE, TO WHICH SUHARTO
HAS AGREED, AND A WEEKLY "OPEN HOUSE" TO RECEIVE PETITIONERS,
TO WHICH THE PRESIDENT DID NOT COMMIT HIMSELF. (COMMENT:
MALIK'S OFTEN CONFUSING AND SOMETIMES EMBARRASSINGLY INACCUR-
ATE PRESS TATEMENTS DURING HIS LAST MONTHS AS FOREIGN MINISTER
WERE REPORTEDLY ONE OF THE REASONS FOR HIS TRANSFER TO
PARLIAMENT. HIS PUBLIC AFFAIRS GUIDANCE MAY SUBSEQUENTLY
NOT RECEIVE THE ATTENTION FROM THE PRESIDENT WHICH MALIK
EXPECTS.)

7. MALIK HAS TO ALL REPORTS OBTAINED ONE OF INDONESIA'S
FINEST DIPLOMATS, AMBASSADOR TO GENEVA ALEX ALATAS, TO SERVE
AS HIS PRINCIPAL ASSISTANT. ALATAS MAY BE A CRITICAL ASSET.
AS FORMER FOREIGN DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN, HE SHOWED AN
UNCANNY ABILITY TO ASSEMBLE ORDER FROM MALIK'S CONFUS-
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ING PUBLIC PRONOUNCEMENTS. MORE IMPORTANT, HE IS HIGHLY RESPECTED BY MILITARY LEADERS CLOSE TO THE PRESIDENT. THE LATTER MAY, IN FACT, HAVE SUPPORTED MALIK'S REQUEST FOR ALATAS' SERVICES IN THE HOPE THAT HE MIGHT HELP CONTROL HIS OLD BOSS. IN THE MEANTIME, MALIK IS REPORTEDLY UNDER HEAVY PRESSURE TO GIVE STAFF POSITIONS TO FELLOW BATAKS, WHOSE BLUNT, DIRECT WAYS CONTRAST WITH THE HAVANESE DE-MEANOUR OF THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE.

8. MALIK HAS FEW REAL FRIENDS IN THE CABINET (THE CURRENT FOREIGN MINISTER SEEMS INDEED TO BE AN ENEMY), AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT IS SHAKY AT BEST. IT IS THEREFORE DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW HE CAN BRING ABOUT SIGNIFICANT SHIFTS IN POLICY. THE RISKS IN TRYING ARE, HOWEVER, NOT GREAT. NO LONGER A PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTEE, HE CAN BE FIRED ONLY WITH GREAT DIFFICULTY AND AT IMMENSE POLITICAL COST. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, WE THINK MALIK WILL CHARGE AHEAD. THERE MAY BE INTERESTING TIMES IN STORE. MASTERS

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